

VZCZCXRO1671

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0821/01 2011638
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 201638Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5377
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3474
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4004
RHMCSSU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 000821

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER MCAP MOPS IS SA SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: DEFMIN MURR TELLS GENERAL PETRAEUS NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BUILD STRONGER MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1. 4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Defense Minister Elias Murr affirmed to visiting CENTCOM Commanding General David Petraeus in a June 30 meeting that the strong U.S.-Lebanese military partnership will grow stronger under the new Lebanese government. Murr said the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) work on a Five Year Plan would continue, and he noted the LAF benefits greatly from U.S. support because of shared values, strategy, and policies. Murr said PM-designate Saad Hariri would acquire nearly \$1.5 billion (presumably from Saudi Arabia) to equip the LAF. Murr noted he would like foremost to acquire platforms that could be used for close air support (CAS), such as the Cessna Caravan, the UAE's Hawk, or light attack helicopters (e.g. the Bell 412). Murr said it was time to build the LAF from the "bottom up" with 80% of new funding going to basic equipment and training and 20% going to "strategic hardware" such as tanks and the air force. Murr declared that the proposed National Defense Strategy was nothing more than an attempt to allow Hizballah to keep its arms. He cautioned that he would reject any policy to integrate Hizballah militia into the LAF.

¶2. (C) Murr confided that the new government must concur with the LAF's strategic mission and then build up the army before it begins to consider disarming Hizballah. He stated that his task was to "strengthen the Army" so that, "one day the Army will be strong and Hizballah will be weak." General Petraeus advised Murr to make acquisitions, particularly aircraft, based on a cost consideration for the initial procurement cost and on the cost of operating and maintaining the equipment. Murr commented that PM-designate Saad Hariri needed good advisors who are "real believers" in the future of the country and the LAF's role or the country would "pay dearly." He said current LAF Commander Jean Kahwagi has the "will" to continue improving the LAF. No one can move Kahwagi, Murr assessed, but, nonetheless, he must be coached to become more "politically correct" and judicious. Murr intimated that he would consider accepting the post of Foreign Minister in the new government.

¶3. (C) In a separate meeting, LAF Commander General Jean Kahwagi told General Petraeus he greatly appreciated U.S. support but requested that it could arrive more quickly. Kahwagi was detailed in his requests, asking for Cessna Caravans, refurbished M113 armored personnel carriers (APC), M4 rifles, body armor, and attack helicopters. Kahwagi asked Gen. Petraeus to help get 45 German Leopard tanks delivered. General Petraeus advised Kahwagi to make wise acquisitions based on cost effectiveness and to concentrate on good training and maintenance. General Petraeus requested both Murr's and Kahwagi's help in finalizing plans for expansion of the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) in a new compound to allow the ODC to provide additional training to the LAF. End Summary.

MURR: WE WON

¶4. (C) Visiting CENTCOM Commander David Petraeus, accompanied by the Ambassador, met with Defense Minister Elias Murr on June 30 at Murr's residence in Rabieh. Also attending the meeting were Defense Attach' LTC James Lantz, Office of Defense Cooperation Chief Col. Joshua Berisford, PolOff, Col. Michael Iverson, Executive Officer, Col. Michael Bell, of the Commander's Initiative Group, Mr. Sadi Othman and Mr. Ali Khedery, advisors to the Commander, LTC Dave Wilson, Defense Department Lebanese Desk Officer and Maj. Ronald Clark, Aide De Camp.

MURR'S PLAN MOVING FORWARD

BEIRUT 00000821 002 OF 004

¶5. (C) Murr spoke positively about the outcome of the June 7 parliamentary elections, saying that a pro-western, March 14-led government will continue strengthening the U.S.-Lebanese military relationship. Murr told General Petraeus that PM-designate Saad Hariri would be able to acquire as much as \$1.5 billion (presumably from Saudi sources) to support equipping the LAF. Murr proposed buying two more Cessna Caravans to complement the one already in inventory and the one soon to arrive. ODC Chief Berisford and General Petraeus affirmed the merits of the Caravan as a strong CAS platform but cautioned Murr on the high cost to outfit the aircraft from its basic configuration. With an initial cost of \$1.8-\$2.2 million each, the Caravan's fully weaponized cost could reach \$22 million, they noted. Murr seemed interested in the 11-12 OV-10s that General Petraeus showed him and reported they might be available on a short-deployment timeline. General Petraeus urged Murr to consider two points in allocating limited funds to purchase aircraft: initial purchase cost and the overall operating and maintenance costs over the long term. General Petraeus cautioned Murr not to be seduced by a low price of a platform (or even the gift of a weapon system), but consider the costs associated with operating the equipment, its maintenance, the availability of spare parts, and the tools and facilities required.

¶6. (C) General Petraeus affirmed that the U.S. procurement system was slow but "shortcuts" to acquiring equipment were inadvisable. He used the previous offer by Russia to provide Lebanon with a gift of Russian MIG-29s as an example of wasting funds on a very expensive aircraft to operate and maintain despite some very attractive initial costs.

¶7. (C) Murr agreed with General Petraeus' recommendations and added that he, too, had advised Hariri of the same points. Murr stated that he intended to focus on building the LAF from the "bottom up" by ensuring more attention be paid to "basic needs," although he continued to mention other specific weapons platforms such as light attack helicopters and M-60 tanks. Murr had interest in these weapons as a part of his "strategic" acquisitions program for the LAF. Murr envisioned using future funds divided 80% for basic equipment

and 20% for strategic acquisitions consistent with his Five Year Plan. He underscored the presence of volatile Palestinian camps and Sunni extremist sanctuaries as threats requiring the need for an air force to deal with them and provide close air support. General Petraeus mentioned the LAF would be well served with V-hulled wheeled vehicles in lieu of more heavy tracked vehicles (e.g. M113 personnel carriers and tanks) because they would be more maneuverable and less destructive on Lebanon's roadways. Murr reiterated Hariri's claim to access to \$1.5 billion in funds in a Saudi no-interest loan repaid over 20 years.

¶8. (C) Murr stated he and LAF Commander Kahwagi would update the LAF five year plan before going to the new government for funds. Murr said he would ask the government rhetorically "what kind of LAF do we need?" Murr concluded it was a force to secure the borders, enforce UNSCR 1701, and counter-terrorism. General Petraeus emphasized the importance of training soldiers' "minds," and supporting good officers with high level command and staff education. General Petraeus invoked Murr to reciprocate U.S. support by helping ODC concluded arrangements to move into a new compound and overall expansion efforts that would ultimately increase the level of support and training ODC provides to the LAF.

VALUES BIND THE RELATIONSHIP

¶9. Murr appreciated General Petraeus' compliments on "feel good accomplishments" related to fighting terrorism and building up the LAF. Murr mused that he had made life difficult for those in the government that wanted to subvert

BEIRUT 00000821 003 OF 004

efforts to strengthen the Lebanese military institution. Murr noted that although the "United States is not an arms dealer, it is the country that possesses the strategy, values, and policy" to assist Lebanon. To that list, General Petraeus added "partnership."

¶10. (C) Murr said PM-designate Saad Hariri needed good advisers on military affairs so Hariri would maintain the principles and values inherent in building Lebanon's military establishment above the sectarian and fractious political life in Lebanon. Murr said military leadership should not be "designated," but built through action and devotion to the institution. On the new government, Murr remarked that Hariri should disregard advisers that want to move quickly or haphazardly. Hariri needed a team of "real believers" in the military as an institution or the country would pay dearly, he believed.

NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY IS A RUSE

¶11. (C) Murr advised strongly not to put much faith in the so-called National Defense Strategy, initiated in the National Dialogue, that would lead to a policy to disarm Hizballah. In fact, it is a ploy to allow Hizballah to maintain its arms, he averred. Murr said he adamantly refused President Michel Sleiman's offers to lead the defense strategy discussions. Murr surmised there were only two current options concerning Hizballah's militia: the army would be "diluted" into Hizballah (i.e. by means of Hizballah supporting leadership appointments) or worse, Hizballah would be directly integrated into the LAF. Murr spoke of his efforts to reduce the percentages of Shia in the army from about 58% to a current 26%, and he declared he "would not go back" to those higher levels of Shia percentages. He claimed there were Hizballah spies in the LAF and that if he remained Minister of Defense he would work to "clean up" some areas in the LAF, stating he would start in the intelligence branch (G-2). Murr added the caveat that current G-2 Chief BG Edmond Fadel was a trusted "good man," but there were problems in

the levels directly below Fadel in Beirut.

GREAT JOB IN THE
COUNTER-TERRORISM ARENA

¶12. (C) General Petraeus told Murr that his and Kahwagi's efforts combating Sunni extremists, Fatah al-Islam and Al-Qaeda in particular, had been impressive. General Petraeus said his own intelligence officers underestimated the success the LAF had in capturing or killing at least five highly sought after terrorists. The LAF had put out a notice to others that Lebanon would not be a safe harbor for terrorists, he discerned. General Petraeus advised Murr to maintain the heightened efforts on counter-terrorism. Defeating Hizballah, he added, would not be won "head-to-head," but through patience, built up over time, and pursuing multiple avenues linked to U.S. and Saudi pressure on Syria, and keeping "Iran busy."

MURR AND KAHWAGI
ON THE SAME PAGE

13.(C) In a separate meeting with LAF Commander General Jean Kahwagi at the LAF HQ in Yarze, General Petraeus and Kahwagi discussed particular weapon systems that Kahwagi believed were critical additions. Kahwagi was well prepared with his list of requests starting with M113 APC refurbishment's, personal body armor, ammunition, M4's, Up-armored Hummers, and Caravans. ODC Chief noted the status of the items in the procurement process and offered to Kahwagi the possibility of acquiring OV-10s instead of more expensive Caravans to satisfy the LAF's CAS requirements. General Petraeus quickly reiterated his message of keeping costs low and considering

BEIRUT 00000821 004 OF 004

the long term operating costs of aircraft, such as the gas-guzzling MIG-29 versus the prop-driven OV-10. General Petraeus also recommended to Kahwagi the acquisition of V-hulled, armored, wheeled vehicles and economizing on helicopters by considering the OH-6 rather than higher-priced, more sophisticated, and larger helicopters. General Petraeus noted the Cobra attack helicopter was not in consideration due to a lack of parts in the supply chain. He also advised Kahwagi to "talk to the French" about the Giselle helicopters (and acquiring missiles for them) in the LAF inventory. Kahwagi declared he had the required \$9 million to purchase 45 German Leopard tanks and asked General Petraeus to help push the Germans to release them.

¶14. (C) General Petraeus and Kahwagi agreed that training was as much an investment in the future of the LAF as equipment. He informed Murr that the Comprehensive Training Program (CTP) was scheduled to start in November and that it was expected to complement and fit in well with the Five Year Plan. He also highlighted the fact that Lebanon had 155 students in the United States this year for International Military Education and Training, a cadet entering West Point, and a new midshipmen at Annapolis. He also told Kahwagi about a new CENTCOM-funded fellowship opportunity through the Near East South Asia Center for a senior LAF colonel to study for six months in the United States.

¶15. (C) General Petraeus praised the efforts of LAF special forces in combating terrorists and noted that Kahwagi's support to finalize plans for an expanded ODC compound without the need for a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) would only help the LAF in its future training and security assistance programs. Kahwagi replied that ODC supported the training efforts well and he would do what was necessary to assist ODC expansion plans.

¶16. (U) General Petraeus has cleared this message.
SISON